

Identify Cost Share Opportunities

A conservation plan can help you decide which state or federal cost share assistance programs would be suitable for your operation. Check with your local NRCS or Soil Conservation District office to see what programs may be available. Office locations and the most up-to-date information program information and program applications are available online at www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov.

You can change your plan.

After you have made your decisions and the conservation plan is complete, you will receive your copy. Another confidential copy will remain on file at your NRCS office.

Changes in markets, weather, or technology may cause you to reconsider some of the choices you made in your plan. If something happens that would force you to change your decisions, you need to revise your plan. Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service to discuss any changes you propose. The NRCS Soil Conservationist will submit your revised conservation plan to your county Soil Conservation District for approval.

If you participate in USDA programs or the state Farmland Preservation Program, it is very important that you keep your conservation plan up to date. As a program participant you are required to certify every year that you are following your schedule.

**For more information contact the local
U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Natural Resources Conservation Service
or the Soil Conservation District
that serves your county.**

Conservation planning makes a difference.

For example, if your field had a 5% slope and a slope length of 200 feet with Downer sandy loam soil, a tolerable soil loss would be 5 tons/acre/year. But, you assess the field and calculate that 8 tons per acre per year are being lost. A few adjustments in your practices can improve your operation by significantly reducing soil loss.



Before:

Corn-soybean rotation
Moldboard plow
Up and Down hill

Erosion = 8 tons/acre/year



After:

Corn-soybean rotation
Chisel plow
Contour farming
Grassed waterway

Erosion = 2 tons/acre/year



Natural Resources Conservation Service

works hand-in-hand with the American people
to conserve our natural resources.



What is a Conservation Plan?

A conservation plan is a written record of your management decisions and the conservation practices you plan to use and maintain on your farm. Carrying out your plan will achieve the goals of protecting the environment on and off your farm. After soil, water, air, plant and animal resources on your property are inventoried and evaluated, the NRCS Soil Conservationist will review several alternatives for you to consider. The alternatives you decide to use are recorded in the conservation plan, which becomes your tool for better management of your natural resources.

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What's in a Conservation Plan?

A conservation plan includes:

- an aerial photo or diagram of your fields;
- a list of your management decisions;
- the location of and schedule for applying new conservation practices;
- a soil map and soil descriptions;
- information sheets explaining how to carry out your specific management decisions;
- a plan for operation and maintenance of practices, if needed.

Benefits of a Conservation Plan

Following your conservation plan has many benefits:

- You will protect your soil and your farm's productivity;
- You will help improve quality of the water in your area;
- You will improve your soil's fertility and manage soil moisture;
- You may attract desirable wildlife by creating nesting sites and winter cover;
- You will protect the productive value of your land for future generations;
- You can more readily comply with environmental regulatory requirements;
- You may be eligible for USDA farm programs.

Getting Your Conservation Plan

Where do you start?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service or Soil Conservation Districts in your county have trained staff available to help you. Call and make an appointment to meet with them. Office locations are listed online at <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov>.

What will you need to do?

You will need to know your crop sequence – what crops you plan to grow in each field. You’ll also need to provide information on how your land is farmed, what kind of tillage equipment you use, existing conservation practices, and your crop and livestock plans for the future.

How is a plan developed?

With the soil conservationist, you will analyze your farm, field by field. You will learn the soil types on your farm, the slope and slope lengths of each field. The Revised Universal Soil Loss equation will be used to find out how much soil is eroding on each field.

You make the decisions

With your help, the conservationist will inventory the resource conditions existing on your farm. They will help you interpret the information about your land, its soil, and production capability. You can discuss resource concerns and solutions field by field.

Then you will decide what changes you can make to protect and improve your land. The soil conservationist will help you by offering a variety of choices, based on the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide for your county.

Next, you will set up a reasonable schedule for applying any needed conservation practices. It may be several years before all your practices are installed. In addition to controlling soil erosion, you can get assistance on other resources concerns, such as **pasture and woodland improvement, managing animal waste, wildlife habitat, irrigation water management, and stream bank protection.**

You make the decisions. The soil conservationist can show you many good alternatives and make some economic comparisons, but you decide what you want to do, when and how.

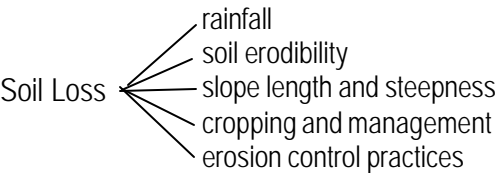
Example Conservation Plan



RECORD OF COOPERATOR DECISIONS

Field	Date	Narrative Record
		CROPLAND
1,2	2003	Conservation Cropping System - CCCHHH
1	2003	Contour Stripcropping - 86' strips
2	2004	Conservation tillage - Chisel plow, 30% residue
1	2004	Grassed Waterway
3	2003	Contour Farming – Nursery stock planted on the contour
1,2,3	2005	Nutrient Management– Apply nutrients according to soil test results and yield goals
		WOODLAND
4	2003	Wildlife Upland Habitat Management– Create openings for quail habitat
		FARMSTEAD
6	2004	Waste Storage Facility

The Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation estimates the amount of soil erosion caused by water. Five factors are used to figure soil loss:



Notice that only the last two factors, cropping and management and erosion control practices, are in your complete control. These are things you can change to reduce soil erosion.



Here’s an example of how your conservation plan might be developed:

You are a cash grain farmer. You raise corn and soybeans. You moldboard plow and disk in the spring. You want to continue growing cash grain; you are not interested in a forage program for livestock. There are several fields on your farm. After working the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation, you realize that excessive soil erosion occurs on a field. This field can serve as an example to show how the conservation planning process works.

Some options to reduce erosion:

1. You could farm on the contour instead of up and down hill, chisel plow instead of moldboard plow, and install a grassed waterway. The waterway will stop the gullying in the lower part of the field.
2. You could use no-till planting and install a grassed waterway.
3. You could construct a tile outlet terraces and moldboard plow on the contour.
4. You could add a close-grown crop, such as winter wheat, to your corn-soybean rotation, chisel plow on the contour, and install a grassed waterway.

What will it cost?

It will cost you nothing to get your conservation plan. This service is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with your local Soil Conservation District.

Some conservation practices, such as changing your crop rotation, stripcropping and contour farming may only require a change in the way you operate your farm. Other conservation practices, such as grassed waterways and terraces, may require additional investment. But part of the cost of these practices may be paid through federal, state and local cost-sharing programs.

For other practices, such as conservation tillage, you may need to invest in different tillage or planting equipment. In some cases, you may be able to adapt your existing equipment for conservation tillage.

Visit NJ NRCS online at <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov>.